

# Beware of Flood-Damaged Cars



When you think of consumer scams related to Hurricanes Harvey, things like price gouging for fuel or home-repair fraud most likely come to mind. Yet, Texans need to be on the lookout for a more subtle and equally underhanded con that often follows big storms – selling flood-damaged cars that are not properly marked.

Historically, flood-damaged vehicles have entered into the market in the months following a hurricane, and this time is sure to be no exception. One survey estimates 500,000 vehicles sustained damage due to Hurricane Harvey. Many of these

cars will be declared total losses; however, vehicles that meet certain requirements can be sold as flood-damaged cars.

In Texas, a seller is required by law to tell prospective buyers about damage to the vehicles. If the damage is the result of a flood, the vehicle's title must say "Flood Damage" on the document.

Most Texas businesses and people are law-abiding, but a handful of companies and individuals try to skirt these consumer laws to maximize their profits. Some car sellers clean and repair flooded vehicles and offer them for sale with the original titles, giving buyers no hint of their histories.

If you plan on buying a used vehicle, do your research and be as thorough as possible. Pull up the carpet in the vehicle's trunk or spare tire well and inspect under the dashboard and seats. Check for rust, mud, dampness, or a mildew smell. Be wary of older-model vehicles that have new upholstery or carpeting.

Have a mechanic you trust inspect the vehicle before buying. In particular, check the oil and transmission fluid. Normal fluids are semitransparent, while the

fluids in a flooded vehicle will be murky and grayish.

Also, check the vehicle history with a private service that can research insurance claims. Contact the Texas Department of Transportation to see if the vehicle has been listed as flood damaged.

I will not tolerate this kind of fraud. A cleaned-up vehicle could be a ticking time bomb with unseen damage, posing mechanical and safety risks to the buyer. If you suspect fraud, report it to the Consumer Protection Division of my office at 1-800-621-0508, or by visiting our site, [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cpd/file-a-consumer-complaint](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cpd/file-a-consumer-complaint). We will aggressively investigate and prosecute cases.

If your vehicle was damaged in the historic flooding during Hurricane Harvey, please file an insurance claim if you have full coverage. If you do not have full coverage, file a claim with FEMA.



## **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

### **Beware of Flood-Damaged Vehicles**

- Inspect the vehicle thoroughly for mud, rust or mildew
- Have a mechanic check the engine and its computer
- Check engine and transmission fluids for water
- Check the car's title and history
- The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles provides a checklist of flooding signs here: <http://bit.ly/2wX9ci9>

### **For vehicle title information:**

#### **Texas Department of Transportation**

Vehicle Title and Registration Division

Customer Help Line:

512-465-7611

[www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov)

### **For insurance information:**

#### **Texas Department of Insurance**

800-252-3439

512-322-4309

[www.tdi.texas.gov](http://www.tdi.texas.gov)